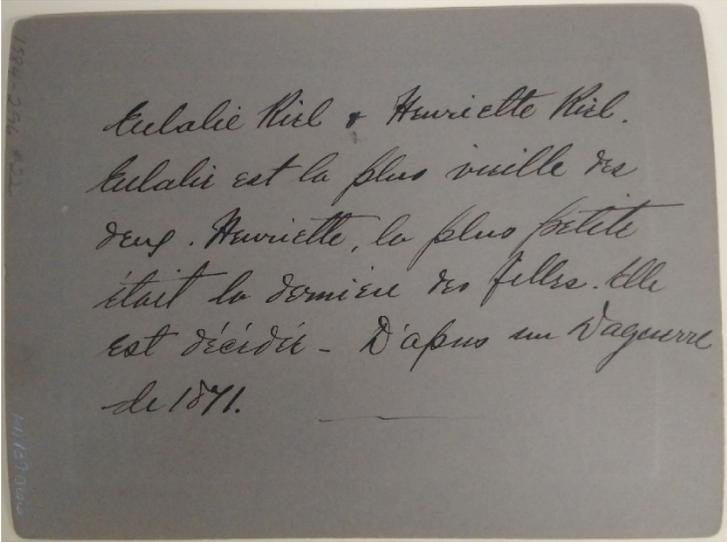


# Riel Family Photo Day

One day in 1871, Julie Lagimodière Riel brought seven of her nine living children to the studio of photographer Ryder Larsen for a family photo shoot. Larsen operated studios in both Winnipeg and St. Andrew's with the Winnipeg studio being closest to St. Boniface. As far as is known, four photographs were taken that day, two family members in each sitting. These four photos are found on innumerable websites, in books, and in museums, libraries, and archives across Canada. In many cases, the subjects have been misidentified and the photographs erroneously dated. This paper is intended to establish the true identities and date. These pictures are comprised of the mother and seven siblings of Louis David Riel.

## Henriette and Eulalie Riel

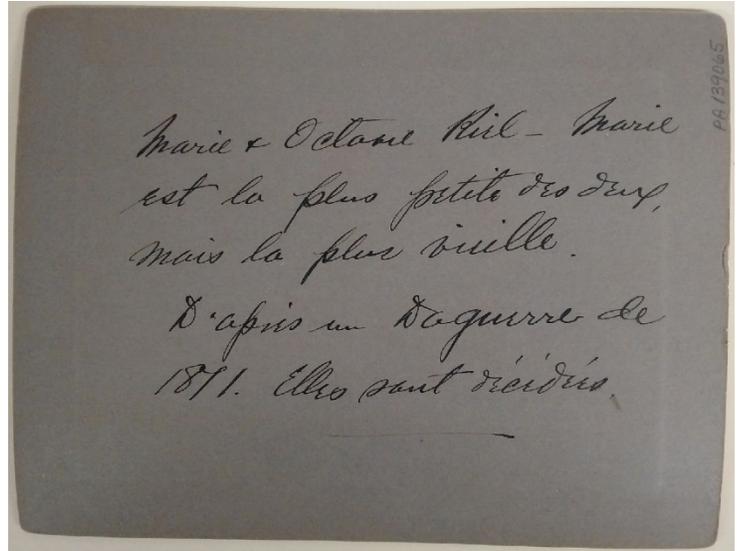
	
<p>Henriette (left) and Eulalie (right) Riel</p>	
<p>Bibliothèque et Archives Canada – Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN no. 3195255</p>	
<p>“Eulalie Riel &amp; Henriette Riel. Eulalie is the oldest of the two. Henriette, the smallest was the last of the daughters. She is deceased – After a Daguerre [Daguerreotype image] from 1871.”</p>	<p>« Eulalie Riel &amp; Henriette Riel. Eulalie est la plus vieille des deux. Henriette, la plus petite était la dernière des filles. Elle est décédée - D'après un Daguerre de 1871. »</p>

The inscriptions on the back of this photo and the three following are in the handwriting of a person unknown. We can deduce that they were written sometime between 1898 and 1931 because the inscription above notes that Henriette was deceased but implies that Eulalie was still living. Henriette died in December 1898 at age 37 and Eulalie died in 1931 at age 77.

## Octavie and Marie Riel



Octavie (left) and Marie (right) Riel



verso

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada – Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN no. 3200080

“Marie & Octavie Riel – Marie, is the smallest of the two, but the oldest. After a Daguerre [Daguerreotype image] from 1871. They are deceased.”

« Marie & Octavie Riel – Marie est la plus petite des deux, mais la plus vieille. D’après un Daguerre de 1871. Elles sont décédées »

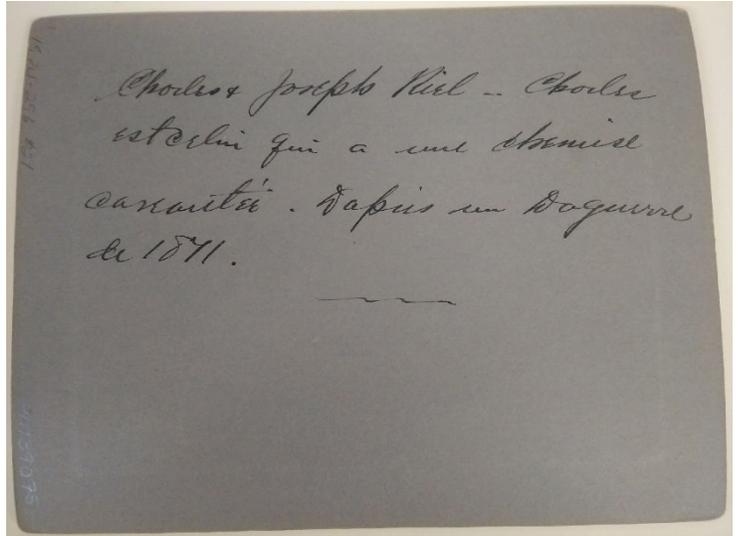
Marie was born 23 October 1850 and died 28 January 1873 at age 22, just two years after this photo was taken.

Octavie was born in 1852 and married Louis Lavallée on 8 February 1875 in Saint Boniface. The couple had six children. She died in 1890 at age 38.

## Charles and Joseph Riel



Charles (left) and Joseph (right) Riel



verso

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada – Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN no. 3623145

“Charles & Joseph Riel – Charles is the one who has a checkered shirt. After a Daguerre [Daguerreotype image] from 1871.”

« Charles & Joseph Riel – Charles est celui qui a une chemise careautée [*sic* – carreautee]. D’après un Daguerre de 1871. »

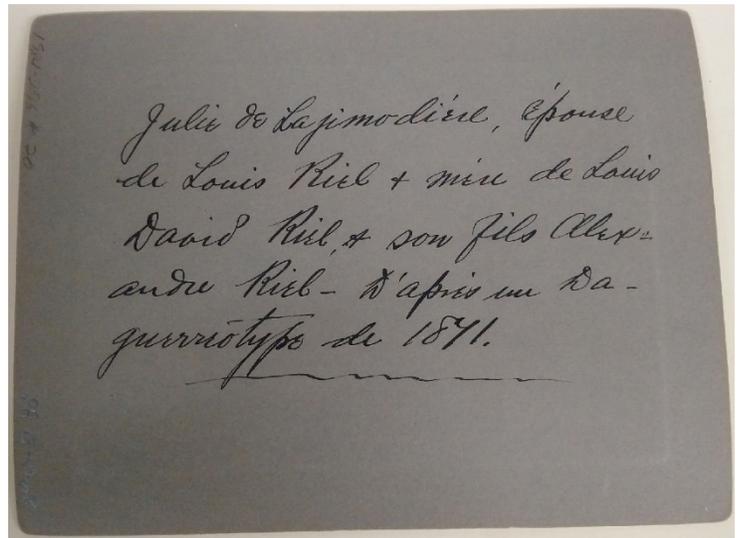
Charles Riel was born 4 November 1854 or 1855 and died 7 November 1874 at age 19 or 20.

Joseph Riel was born 5 February 1858 and died 27 May 1921 at age 63. He was married twice, first on 30 April 1884 to Eléonore Poitras (c1866-1892) and second on 4 April 1894 to Amanda Perrault (1874-1927), collectively having six children.

## Julie Lagimodière Riel and her son Alexandre Riel



Julie Lagimodière Riel and her son Alexandre Riel



verso

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada – Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN no. 3200082

“Julie de Lagimodière, wife of Louis Riel & mother of Louis David Riel & her son Alexandre Riel – After a Daguerreotype of 1871.”

« Julie de Lagimodière, épouse de Louis Riel & mère de Louis David Riel & son fils Alexandre Riel – D’après un Daguerreotype de 1871. »

Alexandre Riel was born in 1863, making him around eight years old at the time this photograph was taken.

Julie Lagimodière Riel was born 23 July 1822 in Saint Boniface and died there on 19 May 1906, the same day that Gabriel Dumont died. Julie’s husband, Louis Riel (*père*) died in 1864, seven years prior to this photograph. She was a widow for 42 years. Julie outlived eight of her 11 children. Only Eulalie, Joseph, and Alexandre survived her.

Alexandre Riel married his first wife, Marie Eliza Poitras, on 14 June 1881. Marie Eliza died in 1903. His second wife was her sister, Bibiane Poitras, whom he married in 1906. Alexandre died on 23 September 1938 in St. Vital, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He outlived all of his siblings.

There is a good case for claiming that the four photographs of Riel Family members were taken on the **same day** in the studio of Ryder Larsen:



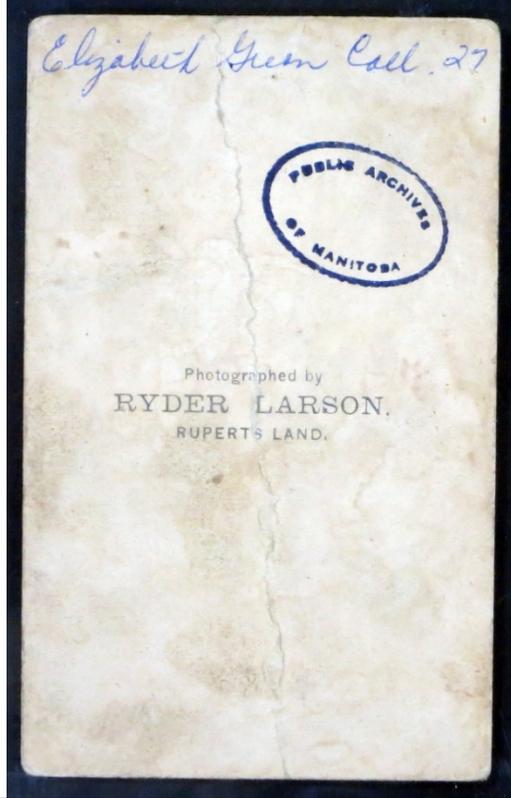
- The people in all four photographs are seated in the same position relative to the Grecian landscape backdrop behind them, *i.e.*, with the Greek temple and a bit of the fence to the left.
- The legs and spindles of the chair on which Alexandre is sitting are identical to those of the chairs on which Charles and Joseph are sitting.
- In each photo, the chairs remain in the same position relative to the floor pattern.
- It appears that, after each photograph was taken, the two subjects got up, leaving the chairs in place, and were replaced by the next two subjects.

Establishing the identity of the photographer also helps to fix the date of the photographs. This is done by comparing the painted backdrop of a Grecian landscape in the Riel photographs to other Ryder Larsen photographs that have the same backdrop **and** that have his distinctive photographer's stamp on back:

FRONT



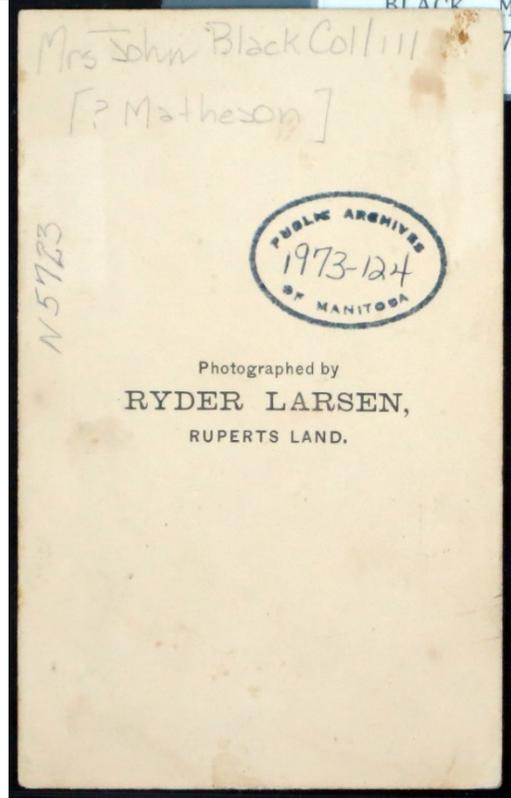
VERSO



FRONT



VERSO



Seen in the two photographs on the previous page are the same Grecian temple (on the right instead of the left), the same tall tree, the same low fence with circular embellishments, and the same broad white base board as is seen in the Riel photographs. Thus we can conclude that the Riel photographs are the work of photographer Ryder Larsen who operated his studios in Winnipeg and St. Andrew's between 1866 and 1871. In 1870 Ryder Larsen was charged in the murder of Thomas Johnstone but the case never came to trial. In 1871 he disappeared from Winnipeg and was never seen again. Thus the Riel photos can be dated to no later than 1871, which is the date written on the back of each photo. All four Riel photographs are in the collection of the Library and Archives Canada, all are attributed to photographer Ryder Larsen, and all are dated 1871.

The little boy seated with Julie Lagimodière Riel has been widely identified as her grandson Jean-Louis Riel. The 1871 date of this photograph predates by 11 years the birth of Jean-Louis in 1882. A comparison of known photographs of Jean-Louis Riel and the little boy seated with Julie shows little to no resemblance:



Marie-Angélique and Jean-Louis Riel  
(sitting on the floor), late 1880s  
Archives of Manitoba, CAM-11-5



Jean-Louis and Marie-Angélique Riel,  
*circa* 1888-1889  
LAC/BAC MIKAN no. 3195233



Julie Lagimodière Riel and  
a young boy, *circa* 1871  
LAC/BAC MIKAN no. 3200082





It has been assumed by many that the little boy seated with Julie would likely be her grandson because of the apparent age difference. To the eyes of many, Julie looks old enough to be the boy's grandmother.

If the little boy were a grandchild, the only one he could be is Joseph Zastre. Joseph was the first grandchild of Louis Riel, Sr. and step-grandson of Julie Lagimodière Riel. Joseph was born in 1866 to Marguerite Marie Riel and Jean-Baptiste Zastre. Given that the photograph is dated 1871, that would make Joseph around five years old at the time of the photograph. The little boy could not be any other grandchild because the next oldest was Oliver Lesprance, born 1870, son of Marie Poulaine Riel and Isaac Lesprance. That makes all other grandchildren not yet born or too young to be in the photograph.

Julie's last child, Alexandre, was born in 1863 when Julie was either 43 or 41 years old, depending on whether her birthdate is accepted as 1820 or 1822. That would make Julie 49 or 51, and Alexandre eight, at the time of the photograph. This would account for the apparent age difference which suggests a grandchild. It is not just possible – but near certain – that the little boy is Julie's own child, Alexandre, not a grandchild.

Deciding whether the little boy is Alexandre Riel or Joseph Zastre could be based on making a judgment as to whether he appears to be closer to eight years old (Alexandre) or closer to five years old (Joseph). Other factors, however, should be considered. Julie Riel had nine living children at the time of this 1871 photograph. Six of them that were photographed that day are Charles and Joseph Riel, Henriette and Eulalie Riel, and Octavie and Marie Riel. Julie most certainly would have brought along a seventh, Alexandre, her youngest child, to be photographed together with his six brothers and sisters. That leaves only two missing children: Louis and Sara. Sara entered the novitiate of the Grey Nuns order in 1862 and was posted to the Oblate mission at Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan in 1871. It is unlikely that she would have been able – or allowed – to attend the photo shoot with her mother and siblings. Louis may have been occupied with the momentous events of that period in his life.

Given that the inscription on the back of the photograph names the little boy as being Julie's son Alexandre, and the near certainty that Alexandre would have been included in the photo session with his mother and six other siblings, it is reasonable to conclude with confidence that the little boy is Alexandre Riel.

prepared by,  
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Bel Air, Maryland  
18 August 2018